

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Wednesday, May 21, 2008
Preston Community Center, Preston, Washington

Commissioners present: Julie Stangell, Doug McClelland, Matt Rourke, Ron Baum, Alex Kamola and Doug Schindler

Commissioners absent: Len Guss and Kevin Buckley

Ex officio members present: Doug Schrenk for Jim Franzel

Ex officio members absent: Marilyn Cope, Jim Franzel and Amy Grotta

Staff: Richelle Rose, Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES); Joanna Richey, Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD); Larry Kimble, Parks Division; David Kimmitt, Parks Division; Bill Loeber, WLRD Forester; Connie Blumen, Parks Division; Joelyn Higgins, DDES; Kristi McClelland, WLRD Forester; Bill Eckel, Office of Rural and Resource Programs, WLRD; Linda Vane, Liaison for the Rural Forest Commission.

Guests: Sandy Miller and Jim Bitney of Wabash Farms; Jennifer Harrison-Cox, Partnership for Rural King County and Boyd Norton, Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).

Meeting Summary

Action Items:

1. A Rural Forest Commission small work group will meet on May 29th in North Bend to craft a response to the presentation on the WLRD business and strategic plan. Linda will provide a break out of the costs of providing services through the Forestry Program.
2. Linda will send out notes on the presentation and discussion heard today.

Minutes:

Motion 1-0508 That the minutes from the January 16, 2008 meeting be approved Approval of the motion was unanimous.

Motion 2-0508 That the minutes from the March 19, 2008 meeting be approved. Approval of the motion was unanimous.

Chair Julie Stangell called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Report on the Business and Strategic Planning for the Water and Land Resources Division

Joanna Richey, Assistant Division Director, Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD), King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Joanna explained the business planning process and gave an in depth explanation of the various funding sources that support work in WLRD. She said that the two primary sources of funding for King County's Forestry Program are the Surface Water Management Fee (SWM) and the General Fund (CX).

Joanna said that WLRD receives a very small amount of CX funding, about \$380,000 annually. This fund is dropping, but the degree of reduction that WLRD will experience is unknown at this point in time.

The SWM fee is leveled on every parcel by almost every jurisdiction in the state, said Joanna. The fee is allowed by state statute to anticipate or help solve problems that occur when property is developed. WLRD has been getting \$29 million annually from SWM. The SWM revenues to the County drop when ever annexation occurs because the new city gets the fee from areas that are annexed. Over the next two to three years projected annexation will decrease WLRD's share of SWM fees to \$19 million. WLRD is projecting a decrease of as much as \$11 million in 2009. WLRD managers are looking at all the services WLRD currently offers and establishing priorities.

From the legal perspective the major purpose of the SWM fee is to mitigate the impact of run off from the land and control pollution. The quality of water is controlled by the federal Clean Water Act, with day-to-day regulatory responsibility delegated to State Department of Ecology. The mechanism is the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Joanna said that King County's new NPDES permit is very restrictive and prescriptive. Focuses on what happens when you develop property for the first time or re-develop it, to ensure that hydrologic function is like pre-existing condition. The new permit will cost more to implement than the previous permit because it requires additional activities.

Doug Schindler asked if preventative measures like retaining forest cover can be considered under the NPDES permit. Joanna said there are some things related to source control, e.g., like landscaping. Doug McClelland asked how will things change as the County's jurisdiction becomes increasing rural? Joanna said right now the County is providing services in diverse urban/suburban/rural mix. She said that in the future the County will have a suburban belt and small lot development (e.g. Bear Creek, Vashon, Preston areas) in addition to low density land uses. She said that one of the County's challenges is to try to balance the demands of the NPDES permit with the most effective mitigation.

Joanna said the criteria for determining priority services in the WLRD business plan are:

- Does the work provide environmental protection?
- Does the work protect public health and safety from a water quality perspective?
- Is the work mandated by State or Federal legal regulations?

Alex said that King County has a social obligation in that the County has encouraged people to move out into rural areas and promoted forest management activities. He said that King County has an obligation to the landowners and the citizens of the County that they cannot walk away from. Joanna said she agrees that WLRD has an obligation to the public.

Doug S acknowledged the difficulty but it does seem that have to recognize that the point is water quality. If forest today is subdivided and developed, then have lost an opportunity we have today to prevent development. All of the policies say the right thing, but he is concerned that critical rural services are going to be lost.

Alex asked about effectiveness. Joanna said it is challenging to figure out cost-effectiveness. She said the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and changes in the clearing and grading code has been effective. She said the requirement to retain 65% vegetative cover on newly developed properties is one of the most effective things the County does.

Alex said that the County needs to consider forest health. Doug S said that the exodus of industrial timber companies and the breaking up of their forest lands into smaller chunks promises to compromise the hydrologic function of forested land in the County. He said that the Forestry Program has value for affecting health and function of forests. Doug M said the County will have to deal with increasing rural jurisdiction and recommended that the County fundamentally change their thinking to a forestry timeline of fifty to seventy years, not a two to three-year planning horizon. He added that there is an opportunity here to get in synch with Cascade Agenda and other long range planning efforts in the region. Doug M listed several ideas for revenue sources.

Joanna asked the RFC to provide input to the business planning process by articulating the value of the services provided to rural forest landowners to County management in a letter, figuring out how to streamline the delivery of services, and suggesting concrete ideas for funding sources other than SWM. Joanna said the timeframe is May in discussion through October. In the first week of October Executive Sims will submit the budget to the County Council.

2008 Comprehensive Plan Policies and Implementation Issues

Discussion led by Julie Stangell, RFC Chair

The County's Comprehensive Plan includes many provisions related to forests that are supported by or recommended by the Rural Forest Commission, including the Forestry Program's technical assistance and training for small forest landowners. The discussion focused on RFC concerns that the business plan being developed by WLRD will eliminate such services to small forest landowners.

Sandy Miller said that there is a problem in the rural area and the County staff that are the most valuable are the people that are working with rural residents in person to get things done.

Richelle said that the technical assistance provided to landowners in developing forest stewardship plans is a huge benefit for DDES because it is a service that the County provides without cost. She said DDES staff have to charge for their services, so being able to send people to the WLRD foresters gets people into the mindset of caring for the forest and makes them more willing to comply with regulations.

Doug M said that when landowners do a forest stewardship plan to enroll in a current use taxation (CUT) program that reduces their property tax burden, they get ongoing services for free from the county forester. They need ongoing forester contact so the next contact they get is not a DDES inspector telling them that they are out of compliance for one reason or another. He suggested that perhaps landowners entering CUT would be willing to pay a fee for forester assistance.

Alex proposed that King County establish a program for providing advice and incentives while entering into a contract with a landowner. The County would approve the forest plan, help to manage the forest and get a fee when timber is harvested. Matt added that it can be tough to manage the decision to harvest and said that to make it work a forest management plan would need flexibility to account for circumstances like fluctuation in the timber market.

Doug M said that revenue from Washington Department of Natural Resources goes to local tax districts. It amounts to about 17% of the timber receipts from about 8 million board feet per year. Doug M suggested that these funds be earmarked by the County for the Forestry Program. He added that there are revenues from timber sales on County working forests that might be used to pay for staff foresters.

Ron suggested that development pay for the mitigation of development by paying a fee for forest stewardship services provided by the County. He said that since development causes water quality problems that forest stewardship mitigates, then fees associated with new construction permits should help support management of the forest that remains. He said that if people know it is going to be spent to maintain forest cover they might support it.

Doug M suggested raising SWM fee by a few dollars per parcel with a portion dedicated to forestry. Julie suggested a separate forest maintenance fee per parcel.

In closing, Alex proposed that the commission write a letter to Executive Sims with recommendations related to continued funding of services to small forest landowners. The commission decided that a small work group to develop such a letter and would get input from the private sector.

The reports on the Management of Forest Lands owned by King County – Parks and Natural Resource Lands were postponed to a future meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, July 16, 2008. The meeting after that will be held on September 17, 2008.

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